

Tape 20

Side A, 0- 1/16

22 JAN 1979

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NOTE FOR:

FROM: DCI

Bob Bowie has developed a conflict for the 2-3 March trip to

25X1

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He'll give in if we can't do anything else, but take a look at the
next week or two and see if it would do.

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Xerox to

LETTERS

THE CONGO DESK

To the Editors:

In the second of his series on "The Struggle for the Third World" [NYR, November 9], Geoffrey Barracough offers the story of Zaire as a touchstone for judging whether the "leopard" of American policy in the Third World "has finally changed its spots." Since he seems to view Mobutu as the creature of US policy and as a puppet sustained by the West's "confidence in his ability to make the Congo safe for Western capital," Barracough appears to make the US responsible for Mobutu's tyrannical behavior and disastrous economic policies.

Although I have not been involved since retiring from the Foreign Service in 1967 except as an interested observer, I was very much preoccupied with Congolese affairs from 1960 to 1967, first as a First Secretary at our Embassy in Brussels and then as an officer of the Office of Central African Affairs, making four trips to the country during that period.

Barracough presents a picture of events during this period, and of US policy, which I find unrecognizable except in the work of some other authors who try to force events into a rigid mold of economic determinism. The real world was far more complex. Let me check off a few points.

At the time of the Congo's independence in 1960 the US "presence" was primarily that of missionaries. As best as I could determine, Americans held about one percent of total foreign investment in the country. Barracough says with assurance that Belgians were "backing the Katanga secessionists." Unquestionably some Belgian investors were; this was true of the officers of Union Minière, whose interest lay in Katanga. But other Belgian capitalists in the same Société Générale industrial "empire" were just as firm in support of the central government in Leopoldville (Kinshasa). Despite pressure from the Katanga-firsters, so, officially, was the Belgian government and (of course) our government. There was no major Congolese politician, including most notably Lumumba, who did not enjoy financial support from some faction of Belgian businessmen.

In the case of US policy initiatives, one cannot really explain them in terms of pressures from investors, importers or exporters. When I was on the desk, the attitude of American business toward French-speaking Central Africa seemed to me characterized largely by indifference. Our motivations were political, overwhelmingly, rather than economic, even though we might strain to find economic justifications. I think we overemphasized the importance of access to Congolese minerals—which went mostly to Europe.

I would agree that American policy pronouncements during the period borrowed too much from the jargon of the Cold War. Partly through habit, bureaucrats were inclined to evoke fears of "communist imperialism" in preparing their budget justifications for aid programs, even after Congressmen started developing an immune reaction. And this leads academia to assume that the State Department is motivated primarily by fear of communist expansion. In fact, most of us were well aware that this ideology had little attraction for the Congolese or even for those leaders of the Mulele rebellion who mouthed the jargon. The real danger was the fragmentation of the country by ethnic parochialism and general anarchy.

It may be hard for cynics to believe, but our major goal really was the improvement in the welfare of the African people, and for those in ex-Belgian Congo, we conceived that to mean the preservation of this vast territory as an economic unit. We therefore consistently supported the Central government, regardless of which leaders were in power. We helped it oppose both "rightist" secession in Katanga, then a "leftist" secession in the northeast, and finally another rightist revolt of foreign mercenaries. I feel no remorse at having had a modest role in this effort.

Overmuch attention has been paid to the role of the CIA in all this. It was active as a source of information and as a covert channel for certain types of assistance to the central government. It was involved to these ends to an extent which our public opinion would not now tolerate. But that does not mean that the US selected the presidents and prime ministers and determined who should be overthrown. The notion that every Third World politician who receives any form of covert subsidy is forever "bought" and an instrument of external direction is a myth. In the Congo it had even less substance than elsewhere. It was in reference to the marketability of Congolese politicians that the comment was first made: "Buy them! Why, you're lucky if you can rent them for the afternoon!"

Mr. Barracough has some interesting insights on the world in general. His interpretation of events in the Congo (Zaire) is flawed by preconceptions. For a more objective version I would commend the article of Crawford Young in the autumn issue of *Foreign Affairs*.

Armistead M. Lee
Arlington, Virginia

Geoffrey Barracough replies:

It is always good to have information from the horse's mouth, and Mr. Lee's letter usefully supplements our knowledge of a very complex story. But after rereading what I wrote about the Congo, it seems to me that if (as Mr. Lee implies) I overshot the mark, so does he. He has a whole paragraph on the role of the CIA (conceding interestingly that it was involved to an extent public opinion would no longer tolerate), but the CIA is nowhere mentioned in my article. Nor did I suggest that "US policy initiatives" can be explained in terms of "pressures from investors, importers or exporters." On the contrary, I explicitly stated that Kennedy resisted pressure from the lobby led by Senator Dodd—and for the same reason that Mr. Lee advances, namely fear of "the fragmentation of the country." That said, I cannot but feel that Mr. Lee is a little too bland and reassuring. For example, nothing is more certain than that the State Department (or possibly it was the White House) did not "consistently" support the central government of the Congo when Lumumba was in power. His appeals for help against Katanga were turned down, which contrasts markedly with the help for Tshombe in 1964.

As for Belgium, I am glad Mr. Lee says that the Belgian government was "officially" backing the Congolese central government in Leopoldville. Actually, Belgian policy was vacillating, and it is true that finally (perhaps wishing to march in step with the United States) it came down against the secessionists. But in the early stages its position was a good deal more equivocal. It was not only "some Belgian investors" who supported Tshombe, but also a large section of the army and some members of the government as well. This is not a myth made up after the event by the eggheads of "academia"; the evidence is set out in full in the contemporary accounts of people who were on the spot and knew what was going on.

But the main point, it seems to me, is different. It is the record of interference, extending down to the present, about which Mr. Lee feels "no remorse." Good for him; but I wonder what he would feel about similar interference by an outside power, in a different continent, in the United States? But, of course, there are large powers and small powers, and one code of conduct for the large and another for the small, in politics as well as in economics. And that, I suspect, is what the demand for a new international order is all about. Certainly it is what Africans resent; and who can blame them?